

Questions and Answers About Diabetes

Fact Sheet



Here are some common questions and answers about diabetes that you can share with your family members.

Fact: Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes means that the amount of glucose (sugar) in your blood is too high. That's why people sometimes call diabetes "sugar" or "sweet blood." Your blood always has some glucose in it because your body needs glucose for energy. But too much of it in the blood isn't good for your health.

Diabetes can lead to serious health problems and premature death, but people with diabetes can take steps to manage the disease and lower the risk of damaging their kidneys, eyes, nerves, and gums and teeth.

There are two common types of diabetes:

Type 1 diabetes, formerly called juvenile diabetes, is usually first diagnosed in children, teenagers, or young adults. People with type 1 diabetes make no insulin and must take insulin every day. (Insulin helps sugar from food get into your cells.)

Type 2 diabetes, formerly called adult-onset diabetes, is the most common type of diabetes. With type 2 diabetes, the body does not make or use insulin well. People with type 2 diabetes often need to take pills or insulin. Being overweight and inactive increases the chances of developing type 2 diabetes.

Am I at risk for diabetes?

You have a higher chance of getting diabetes if you:

- Are age 45 or older
- Are overweight
- Are African American, Hispanic, Asian American or Pacific Islander, or American Indian
- Have a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes
- Have high blood pressure (above 140/90)
- Have low HDL (good cholesterol) and high levels of blood fats
- Had diabetes when pregnant, or gave birth to a large baby (over 9 pounds)
- Are physically active less than three times a week

Continued on the next page.

Questions and Answers About Diabetes (continued)

Fact Sheet

How do I know if I have diabetes?

You may have one or more of the warning signs below, or you may have no signs at all. Talk to your doctor about getting a blood test to check your glucose levels to know if you have diabetes or pre-diabetes (a condition where blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough for a diagnosis of diabetes).

The signs of diabetes are:

- Being very thirsty
- Urinating often
- Feeling very hungry or tired
- Losing weight without trying
- Having sores that heal slowly
- Having dry, itchy skin
- Losing the feeling in your feet or having tingling in your feet
- Having blurry eyesight

What can I do to manage or prevent diabetes?

Managing diabetes requires effort every day to eat healthy foods, be physically active, take diabetes medicine as prescribed, and test blood glucose levels. You can take steps to prevent or slow down other health problems diabetes can cause over the years by managing your blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol. If you have diabetes, work with your health care provider to create a plan for managing your health.

You can do a lot to lower your chances of getting diabetes. Some tips are:

- Be physically active on a regular basis
- Eat less fat and fewer calories
- Lose weight if you need to

Lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels also helps you stay healthy. Talk to your health care provider to make a plan to lessen your risk and improve your health.

For More Information

Contact the National Diabetes Education Program at 1-888-693-NDEP (6337) or www.ndep.nih.gov.

